

76

HIGH-FLOWN
EPISCOPAL *and* PRIESTLY
CLAIMS

FREELY EXAMIN'D:

In a DIALOGUE betwixt a *Country Gentleman* and a *Country Vicar*.

WHEREIN

CHURCH-AUTHORITY, CONFIRMATION, ABSOLUTION; the BURIAL of the DEAD, the POWER of BISHOPS to give the HOLY GHOST, and of PRIESTS to forgive SINS; the CONSECRATION of CHURCHES and CHURCH-YARDS, and BOWING toward the ALTAR and the EAST; are particularly consider'd.

To which is Prefix'd,

An ADMONITION to those who are press'd to come to Confirmation :

And some REMARKS on a Book lately publish'd, intitl'd, *Short Instructions for them that are preparing for Confirmation, &c.*

L O N D O N;

Printed for J. NOON, at the *White-Hart*, near *Mercers-Chapel*, in *Cheapside*; and R. HETT, at the *Bible*, in the *Poultry*.

MDCCLXXVII.

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*A Serious ADMONITION to
those who are press'd to offer
themselves to Confirmation.*

Dear Brethren and Friends,

IS of infinite Importance both to your Comfort in this World, and to your Happiness in the other, that you have right Notions of RELIGION. You will take therefore in good part this sincere Attempt to assist you herein. The *Devil* hath been ever busy to take off Mens Attention from *real* and *true* RELIGION; and to amuse them with *Rites* and *Forms*, and things of a ceremonial Nature, which have really nothing of Religion in them. He first *deceives*, and then *destroys*.

If we look into the *Pagan World*, we see Men dancing round ugly Idols; howling, weeping, cutting themselves with Lances; committing the most filthy and abominable Acts; sacrificing one another; yea, throwing their own struggling and shrieking Babes into the Arms of a burning Image, to be there tortur'd and consum'd. — And this with them is RELIGION: 'Tis done for their Soul's Health; and to expiate their Sins, and reconcile 'em to their Gods.

If we look into the *Jewish World*, there we see them devoutly busy in washing Garments, Hands and

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Cups ; they dare not touch *this* Thing, nor eat *that*, for fear of being defiled ; and are scrupulously exact in Tithing even Pot-Herbs, Mint, Annise and Cummin. — This with them is RELIGION ; and thus they hope to reconcile themselves to God, and secure the Divine Favour.

If we look further into *Popish* Countries, we see RELIGION disguis'd under other monstrous and odd Forms. Be punctual to your Beads ; come often to Confession and Mass ; be strict in your Penances, liberal to the Priest, zealous against Hereticks ; hate, kill, damn, as far as 'tis in your power, all who are not of your Church. — And *This* will prove you to be *religious* ; *This* is for your Soul's Health ; *This* is what fits you for the Presence of God, the Company of Angels, for that State of perfect Wisdom, Love, Peace, prepar'd in Heaven by *Jesus Christ*.

To come nearer Home. What is it to be *religious* with Multitudes amongst our selves ? Why, to have been baptiz'd into this true and establish'd Church of *England* ; to have had Godfathers and Godmothers, and the Sign of the Cross ; to have been confirm'd by the Bishop, and solemnly declared regenerated and forgiven by this Ambassador of Christ ; to keep constantly one's Church ; to come *often* to the Sacrament, *never* to a Conventicle, to take the Eucharist in our last Sickness ; and in the Name of the Holy Trinity to be absolv'd by the Priest ; to have Burial read over us, and to lie interr'd and rotting in Holy Ground. — These seem to be the chief Things which Multitudes amongst us mean by RELIGION : *These* they count highly *profitable*, if not *necessary* to their Souls Health ; and a Defect in such Things shall oftentimes give greater Uneasiness and Offence than Defects of a moral kind.

The Discourses and Conduct of many of our Clergy too manifestly cherish this dangerous Mistake. What a Stress do they lay upon *Rites, Forms, Habits, Places* of Worship, and various other Things, of which *the Scriptures* say not a Word; infusing into Mens Minds a superstitious Veneration for them, and treating those who dislike 'em, and who worship God in a more primitive and *scriptural* way, with Anger and Contempt.

But, dear Brethren and Friends, *be not deceiv'd* by such Amusements as these. *God is not mock'd*. Remember the Words of our great Lawgiver and Judge. *IN VAIN do they worship me, teaching for Doctrines the Commandments of Men*. If you have no Religion but *this*, as sure as God is in Heaven, you can never get thither. *True RELIGION* is something far different from all This; it consists in the right Knowledge, sincere Love and Imitation of the *blessed* God; in an Heart dead to the Honours, Riches and Pleasures of this present World, thro' a real Belief of the Doctrines of Christ; it consists in the subduing our Appetites, the right Government of our Passions, the Practice of universal Righteousness, Temperance, Meekness, &c. and in a pure and unfeigned LOVE to *Men* of all Countries; and to *Christians* of all Parties and Denominations around us. Without a Temper and Conduct thus form'd after the Pattern and Laws of *Jesus Christ*, neither the Hands of an hundred Bishops, nor the Absolution of a thousand Priests can do you the least good. They may with great seeming Solemnity *pronounce you forgiven*, and in the Name of the sacred Trinity *assure* you of the Divine Favour: — but 'tis to your infinite peril, Christians, if you lay any stress on such *religious Charms*; they are but *Wood, Hay, Stubble*, which superstitious and designing Men have built upon the Christian Doctrine, and will never stand the

Fire of the last great and trying Day, but be miserably burnt up. The *Kingdom of God* or TRUE RELIGION is not Meat and Drink, (*i. e.* consists not in Rites and Forms, and ceremonial Observances) but Righteousness, Peace and Joy in the Holy Ghost. And he that in these Things serveth Christ, (of what Party or Sect soever he be) this is the Man that is accepted of God; and however he be now cast out and reproach'd, he will finally be approved and honour'd of Men. Rom. xiv. 17, 18.

The Occasion of my offering you these Reflections at present, is the great Stir the Clergy around you are making to bring their Parishioners to be confirm'd by the Bishop. How highly they extol it; and with what Earnestness press it both publicly and from House to House; sometimes by Threats, sometimes by fair Words constraining young and old to come and receive this *Episcopal Grace*; your selves can bear 'em witness. But that all this Zeal is either *Artifice* and *Trick*; or else, *Ignorance* and *Superstition*, the following Dialogue will help you to perceive. I thought it needful to expose in a true Light, those Claims of Episcopal and Priestly Authority, because I am persuaded they are of very dangerous Consequence, a Snare to the weak; an Offence to the Wise; an Artifice of the Devil to lull Men asleep in Vice; subversive of the Peace and good Order of our State; and highly injurious and disgraceful to our Religion.

I am confirm'd in this Persuasion by a little Book which is industriously scatter'd by the Priests on these Occasions, intitled, *Short Instructions for them that are preparing for Confirmation, by way of Question and Answer, &c.*

'Tis there ask'd, pag. 6. *By what Authority was Confirmation instituted in the Church?* Answ. *Our Church hath declared concerning Confirmation, (Can. 60.) that it hath been a solemn, ancient, and laudable*

dable Custom, continued from the Apostles Times, that all Bishops should lay their Hands upon Children baptized and instructed in the Catechism of Christian Religion, praying over them and blessing them, that they may receive the Holy Ghost. A Confutation of this, see in some of the following Pages.

In the same Page you are taught, That by the Prayers and Imposition of the Bishops hands God conveys THE SPECIAL GIFTS AND GRACES of his holy Spirit, and thereby confirms every worthy Candidate.— Now what makes a Person a worthy Candidate, the Office itself has expressly determin'd, viz. the being able to say the short Catechism ; and a renewing the solemn Promise and Vow which was made for him in Baptism, &c. To every Person who does this, the Instructor affirms, God by the Bishop's hands conveys the special Gifts and Graces, &c. even these seven-fold Gifts ; 1. Wisdom. 2. Understanding. 3. Counsel. 4. Ghostly Strength. 5. Knowledge. 6. True Godliness. 7. Holy Fear. There is doubtless something mystical in the Number SEVEN, else why should the Instructor puzzle his own and his Pupil's Brains with a curious Distinction betwixt Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, and Knowledge.— With equal Propriety as these Gifts are made seven, they might have been made seventeen, or even seventy : But because seven is reckon'd a sacred Number, and we read of seven Spirits before the Throne, Rev. i. 4. seven Stars, seven Lamps, &c. the Mystery seven must be here spied out in the Church's Office ; tho' she, good Lady! (i. e. three or four pious, but fallible Men, who drew up this Office) never dreamt, I presume, that any such Mystery would by the Wisdom of After-Ages be discover'd therein.— If one were disposed critically to remark, it might be ask'd, How true Godliness comes to be here reckon'd amongst the Gifts of the Holy Spirit ? It belongs surely to the other

other Head, of its *Graces*, not its *Gifts*; and thus *the Instructor*, forgetting himself, pag. 11. calls it—*That GRACE by which, &c.* But as the mystical and perfect Number *seven* could not else have been found in this Prayer of the Church, 'tis presum'd that by the candid Reader such an Absurdity may be overlook'd.

Pag. 14. 'Tis ask'd, *Q. Is the Holy Ghost given now in laying on of Hands as to the first Christians?*
A. Yes, the Holy Ghost (i. e. the Gifts of the Holy Ghost) is AS TRULY given in laying on of Hands now, as to the first Christians, tho' not altogether in the same Manner or Degree. And in several other parts of this Performance the Person *confirm'd* is consider'd as having by that Rite undoubtedly *receiv'd* the Holy Ghost.— So that, in short, the plain Design of these Instructions, and of the Clergy in scattering them, and of their cherishing in the People such a Veneration for this Rite, is to inculcate a Belief, *That the Bishops are even now, by laying on their Hands, and Prayer, able truly and indeed to give the Holy Ghost.* A Belief, which when God in his great Displeasure to these sinful Lands shall give them up to so strong a Delusion as to admit, we shall be then ripe for the vilest Slavery, and be again curs'd with Ecclesiastical Tyranny and Chains. A full Refutation of these enormous Pretensions you will find in the ensuing Dialogue.

I am persuaded some of the most excellent of our Bishops and Priests disclaim such Pretensions, and *think soberly* of the Powers given them by God: And such will not, I hope, be offended at the Freedom here taken, with the extravagant Claims which are made in their Names. I unfeignedly reverence the *learned*, the *wise*, and the *sober* of that Order; and think a faithful and good Clergy, who shall teach Men true Virtue, and by their Discourses keep the People from the wrong Opinions and Practice,

tice, into which Ignorance and Superstition naturally lead them, to be a great Blessing to a Nation, and as useful *Ministers in the State* as any it employs : And I heartily thank God, and congratulate you my Friends, that there are so many of this Character among the Clergy of our Land. I would be far from attempting to lessen your Esteem of such, for they *merit* your Veneration, and ought to be *esteem'd very highly for their Works sake* : But when under the specious Cover of the *Priestly Character* they grasp at undue Power, and act not as Ministers (i. e. *Servants*) but as LORDS over Christ's People ; when they depart from the Simplicity and Purity of the Gospel, and cause Separations and Divisions in the Christian Church, by requiring Things as *necessary* to Christian Communion, which Christ has left *indifferent* ; when they teach for Doctrines the *Commandments of Men*, lay a stress upon Things upon which the *Scriptures* have laid none, and would have you believe that as *the immediate Officers and Representatives of Christ on Earth*, they have Power to decree Rites, to determine Controversies in Points of Faith, *authoritatively to forgive Sins, and really to give the Holy Ghost, &c.* When any, whether Bishops or Priests, thus *stretch themselves beyond their Measure*, and think of themselves not *soberly, but more highly than they ought to think*, we are then in Duty bound to enter our bold Protest against them, and to *stand fast in the LIBERTY wherewith Christ hath made us free, and not be again intangled with any Yoke of Bondage.* The Duty we owe to GOD, to Christ, to our excellent Religion, (which are all on this account greatly blasphem'd and reproach'd by Unbelievers) our Duty to our Country, to Posterity, yea, to the unhappy Persons themselves who make these enormous Claims, loudly calls us forth, *Christians*, strenuously to oppose them. *This* was the very Mean by which *Popery* of old open'd itself a way and crept into the World ;
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and *thus* it grew up to that dreadful and oppressive Tyranny which hath long grievously corrupted and harass'd the Church. As Providence has broken the heavy Yoke from our Necks, let us not tamely suffer ambitious and artful Men to slide it on us again. Remember, *we are called unto LIBERTY* : By our great Charter, the Gospel, we are freed from all Authority and Power of Men in Matters of Religion : *One* only is our *Master* and authoritative Director in this great Affair, even CHRIST; and all we, Princes and Subjects, Bishops and Mechanicks, Clergy and Laymen, all we are *Brethren*; we stand all upon the same Bottom, and none of us can warrantably claim the least Superiority or Dominion over his Brother.

If what is here offer'd gives you juster Notions of Religion, and Christian Liberty ; if it helps you to see thro' the Designs of crafty, the Arrogance of haughty, and the Weakness of superstitious Men; if it takes you off from a wrong Dependence on Ceremonies and Rites, and Things of human Device, and assists you to place it more upon the Practice of Justice, Temperance, Godliness, and a diffusive Benevolence and Charity to all Men : I shall count my self happy in having in any wise contributed to this ; and may God the Father of Lights, and *Jesus* the great Instructor and Head of the Church, fill us with all Wisdom, that we may understand the glorious Liberty into which he has called us, and walk worthy of it.

To his Grace and Divine Spirit I humbly commend this Attempt towards reviving his primitive and pure Religion, and wiping off that Reproach which the Avarice, the Superstition and Pride of Men have brought upon it : Even to HIM, who *out of weakness can make strong* ; and who *sends by whom he will send*. To Him be the Glory, the Victory and the Majesty, World without End. *Amen.*

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HIGH-FLOWN

Episcopal and Priestly Claims

FREELY EXAMIN'D,

In a DIALOGUE betwixt a *Country-Gentleman*, and a *Country-Vicar*.

Gent. GOOD-Morrow, Mr. ———, whence comes this early Visit?

Vic. I wish you, Sir, a happy Day : the reason of my present Visit is a Letter I last Evening receiv'd from the Bishop, signifying his Intention to visit this part of his Diocese in order to *confirm* : I came therefore to give you this early notice, that your numerous young Family may get themselves prepar'd.

Gent. I am oblig'd, Sir, by your kind Intention : but as to the Business of *Confirmation*, I confess I am not well satisfy'd ; scarce as to the *Lawfulness*, much less as to the *Expedience* or *Usefulness* of it.

Vic. I am surpriz'd to hear this, from a Person of your good Sense and Affection to our Church.

Gent. How great soever your Surprise may be, mine is not less, to see Men of such Piety, Learning and Sense, as many of our Bishops and Clergy are, pressing upon the People, and practising over them this *odd*, if I might speak it without offence, I would say this *superstitious* and *delusive* Rite.— As

for my Affection to our Establishment ; I own I have lately read with Attention and Pleasure the *Bangorian Controversy*, and am thence fully convinc'd, that no Powers upon Earth, neither Ecclesiastical nor Civil, no King nor Parliament, nor Councils nor Synods have any the least Authority in Matters of Religion.— That CHRIST alone is King in his Kingdom, the Church,— and that therefore for any Man or Bodies of Men, to claim to themselves a *Power to decree Rites and Ceremonies, and Authority in Controversies of Faith* *, seems to look like an Invasion of Christ's Throne. That consequently those who claim this Power seem to be USURPERS in Christ's Kingdom ; and that those who submit to it do so far withdraw their Allegiance from Christ, and own another Lord.

Vic. You appear, Sir, a little warm ; but have surely overshot the Bishop's Mark ; and carried his Principles much farther than he design'd. For after all, that great Prelate has wrote against human Authority in Matters of Religion, you see he continues fix'd to our establish'd Church, and is one of the strongest Pillars and brightest Ornaments of it.

Gent. I highly reverence that excellent and great Man ; I think him a glorious Light rais'd up by God to bless this happy Age ; I admire the Strength with which he pleads the Rights of the Christian Church, and am persuad'd, his Principles if thorowly pursued, would establish Christianity upon its only true and sure Bottom, would restore its ancient Glory, and surround it with Bulwarks far stronger than any Laws a King and Parliament can enact. But how to reconcile his Lordship's *Principles* with his *Practice* in subscribing, and submitting to human Authority in the Kingdom or Church of Christ, is not mine, but his *Lordship's* to consider. I confess I was not a little startled to see in the public News-

* xxth Article of the Church of England.

News-Papers, that his Lordship also was preparing to *visit* and *confirm* in several Parts of his Diocese.

Vic. But, what is there, Sir, in our Office of *Confirmation*, which gives you such Disgust ?

Gent. Why to be plain ; First, There is nothing so much as *plausible*, much less *rational* to be urg'd for it ; and secondly, there is a great deal of both to be said against it. There is nothing *plausible* to be urg'd for it, either from *Reason* or *Scripture*.

Vic. Not from *Reason*, I own ; for 'tis a Matter of Revelation ; an instituted Rite of the Christian Church ; like Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Gent. If it be an instituted Rite ; shew me, where is it instituted ?

Vic. I do not pretend it to be instituted in express Words ; but it seems to be an Appendix to Baptism, without which 'tis not *complete* : For thus we read *Acts* viii. 14. when *Philip* had converted and baptized the *Samaritans*, the Apostles sent *Peter* and *John* to lay their Hands on them.

Gent. If Baptism be not *complete* without this Rite, as I know some of the Clergy when recommending it affirm ; then the Commission and Form of Baptism our Lord gave his Disciples, when he bid them, *Go teach all Nations, baptizing them in the Name, &c.* were not *complete* : and all who have been thus baptized by them and their Successors since, have been not *completely* baptized. But this I presume you will not assert. As for the Apostles being sent to lay their Hands on the *Samaritans*, the Design of it is expressly mention'd, *viz. That they might give them the Holy Ghost, ver. 17. i. e.* His extraordinary and miraculous Gifts, such as Praying, Prophecy, Speaking with Tongues, &c. to form them into a Church. These Gifts, 'tis plain, were visible, obvious to Sense ; for 'tis said, when *Simon* saw that through laying on the Apostles Hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offer'd

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them Money, &c. ver. 18. Besides, as Dr. *Whitby* well observes, if they laid not their Hands on ALL who had been baptized, it makes nothing for Confirmation. If they did, then *Simon Magus* also was confirm'd, and received the Holy Ghost, which you will hardly admit.

Vic. But as the Apostles by Prayer and Laying on their Hands antiently conferr'd the extraordinary Gifts, why may not the Bishops, their Successors, now by the same Rite confer the ordinary Gifts of the Holy Ghost ?

Gent. This, I am sensible, our high-flown Churchmen would fain have us believe. The little Book intitled, **Short Instructions for them that are preparing for Confirmation, &c.* which you lately left with my Family, boldly speaks out ; and is not ashamed to assert †, *That the Holy Ghost (i. e. the Gifts of the Holy Ghost) is AS TRULY given in Laying on of Hands now, as to the first Christians.* — Even those Gifts which are of perpetual Use for sanctifying and strengthening every Member of Christ's Church, and equally necessary for all Christians in all Ages, — and without which none can be saved. This is verily a strange Assertion, and if it be not well supported, instead of getting Honour to our Bishops, will be apt to draw upon them Displeasure and Contempt. 'Tis a matter of vast moment, and strange Consequences must attend it, if this Claim can be made good : Let me therefore observe,

1. That this Pretension seems not to consist with the Office itself ; for therein the Bishop owns, that the Person on whom he is going to lay his Hands is actually regenerated by the Holy Ghost, and has therefore already receiv'd this heavenly Gift ; so that he does not lay on Hands after the Example of the Apostles, as the Office affirms, for they did it, by that Rite, to confer the Holy Ghost on those who had

had *not* before receiv'd him ; whereas the Bishop lays his on those whom he confesses *already* to have him.

2. This Doctrine, if true, convicts and condemns the whole venerable Bench of Bishops of most inexcusable Neglect and Cruelty to the Souls of Men. For if they *CAN thus really confer these sacred Gifts*, why in the Name of God, who hath thus marvelously empower'd them, (an Unbeliever may ask,) do they saunter about Courts, and waste their precious Months in Parliamentary Attendance? Far nobler and more important Work demands their Regard. Thousands of wretched Souls languish in their several Dioceses for want of those *heavenly Gifts* * their Hands can impart. Let the Cries of captive and dying Spirits from every Corner of our Land come up into the Ears of these Right Reverend and Holy LORDS.— Come out, *sacred Fathers*, from the Grandeurs both of Royal and Parliamentary Courts ; and from the Luxury and Ease of your own Princely Palaces : You are *Successors* of the Apostles in the wondrous Power of *giving the Holy Ghost* ; *succeed* them in their Travels, their Labours, their Watchings. — Can his Lordship of London justify it to the many Myriads in our *American Plantations*, of whom he has taken the *Episcopal Charge*, if at least once in his Life he doth not visit and disperse amongst them these *Spiritual Donations*, the *great LORD* of the Church hath enabled him to bestow? It may be attended, indeed, with some Danger and Toil to his Lordship's *Body*, but the conferring *any Measure* of the Holy Ghost on so many thousand *Souls*, must infinitely outweigh any Consideration of worldly Ease.— So that if from their Lordships *Practice*, we may judge of their *real Sense* as to this Matter,

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* What those Gifts are, see in the *Admonition*.

we may confidently affirm, that they believe no such Divine Virtue to flow from their Hands, as the deluded Multitude imagine; and that they think themselves *no more able really to give the Holy Ghost than any of their Neighbours.*

3. This high Claim is evidently contradicted by Fact and Experience. The Instructor above cited, says, page 13. *That the Fruits of the Holy Ghost are the twelve following Graces, Love, Joy, Patience, &c. and by those Fruits we shall know whether we still have the seven-fold Gifts of the Holy Spirit.* If then a Person has not those Graces, by this it may be known that he has not the Gifts; or in other Words. That the Bishop, when he pretended to give him the Holy Ghost, did *not* give it him at all. Now let those who have pass'd under this strange Solemnity say, — Did they feel any moral Change wrought upon their Minds, by this laying on of the Bishop's Hands? Have they found themselves *since* more meek, patient, temperate, &c. than before? Can those around, who converse with them, bear Testimony to such moral Change? Yea, and is this true, not only as to a single Instance or two, but is it *generally* the Effect of this magnify'd Rite? Do not People usually return from it as ignorant, as proud, as covetous, &c. as they went thither? Fact and Experience put it beyond doubt.

But what I chiefly insist on is,

4. That this Doctrine and high Claim is extremely dangerous to our *Civil Liberties*, and threatens our happy Order and Constitution *in State*. For if our Bishops can now *really bestow the special Gifts and Graces of the Holy Ghost, and are the immediate Officers and Representatives of Christ*, (as this Instructor, page 6, affirms) Who can enough *venerate*, I had almost said *adore*, these *spiritual LORDS*? An Ecclesiastical Censure or Excommunication from

from the Bishops Court, may soon strike the same Terror into the good Subjects of *Great Britain*, as the Bulls and Excommunications of a certain Bishop of old. — What Difference is there, but in the Sound, betwixt being the VICAR of *Christ*, and his IMMEDIATE OFFICER AND REPRESENTATIVE ON Earth; *This*, the *English* Bishop is; *That*, the Bishop of *Rome*. But let *this* Opinion of the Episcopal Authority prevail, and a wide Door is set open for all the Miseries and Disorders of the Papal Tyranny to return. What are the Crowns of Kings; or what all the Civil Blessings they can give, or secure to us, if compared with those *special Gifts and Graces of the Holy Spirit* the Bishop can bestow? I have far greater Reason therefore to love and to fear my BISHOP than my KING: His Majesty can but protect and do good to my Body; His Lordship can enrich and beautify my Soul, with the *seven-fold Gifts*, &c. Give way therefore ye Kings; rise up ye Princes and Nobles of the Earth; kneel down and pay Homage at the *Episcopal* Feet. — To such extravagant Heights do the Powers here claim'd naturally carry the *Episcopal* Character; tending to lay Kings at the Feet of those *Ambassadors and Representatives* of *Christ*; and to make Crowns and Scepters depend on their Will. For what can the most absolute or powerful Princes do, when their People are bewitch'd with a superstitious Veneration of an *higher Character* than theirs? they are at once stript of their Supremacy, made dependent, and enslaved—.

This was the very Manner the proud Bishop of *Rome* got his antient Dominion over the Kings of the Earth.— They had Stomach to *resent* these Claims of the holy Usurpers; and inwardly *disdain'd* the Homage they paid them. But what could they do? Their People had drunk deep, even to Madness,

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of the Cup of priestly Infatuation : They thought their Bishops could dispense the Blessings or the Curses of Heaven, at their Will.— And who can then blame them for having the Persons and the Decrees of these *Representatives of Christ*, in greater Veneration than those of *Emperors or Kings* ?

Thus Antichrist, or the papal Tyranny, at first arose in the Church ; 'twas by Claims only of *spiritual*, that he grasp'd all his *earthly* Power : And in whatever Age or Kingdom of the World the *like* Notions of Episcopal Authority prevail, there it *will*, there it *must* have the *like* fatal Effects. It undermines the Thrones of Kings, and gives up their Dominions to the Mercy and Disposal of these *immediate Officers of Christ*. These Claims therefore, if not founded upon the clearest Evidence, are by all good Subjects and good Christians to be rejected with abhorrence ; they shake the very Basis of our happy Constitution, set the *Mitre* above the *Crown*, and bring a grievous Yoke upon our Necks, which neither we nor our Fathers were able to bear.

I wonder, by the way, whether the *Kings and Princes* Royal of *Great-Britain* are ever confirm'd by our Bishops. If they can certainly give the *Spirit of Wisdom, of Counsel, of Ghostly Strength, &c.*— as is pretended, the Princes who govern us have, surely, always great need of this invaluable Gift ; and therefore ought to kneel down (or if they refuse, good People may think, ought to be *forc'd* to kneel down) and humbly receive it.— But how would a Court of *British* Nobles brook it, to see their Sovereign kneeling at a Bishop's Feet ? It would give them too strong an Image of the Homage claim'd from crown'd Heads by a certain Bishop of old, and of the dreadful Evils which sprang from it, to be easily borne.

Vic. There is some Weight, I own, in what you offer. I will not make my self answerable for these high Claims of my Brethren.— But to return to *Confirmation*,— tho' it might not be fully proved from this viii. of the *Acts*, nor from *Heb. vi. 2.* where we read of *the Doctrine of Baptisms, and of Laying on of Hands*— (for the Apostle probably is there speaking of some *Jewish** Washings and Rites) yet the *Authority of the Church* is, I think, sufficient to injoin it: 'Twas an antient Usage in the Church; and, I own, our Office in the Common-Prayer seems to ground its Practice, at least the Qualifications of those who are to receive it, rather upon the *Authority of the Church*, than upon any expresse Scripture; for it says, *To the end that Confirmation may be ministred to the more edifying of such as shall receive it, THE CHURCH hath thought good to order, &c.*

Gent. Let me soberly ask you, Sir, what is *that* CHURCH which is here said *to order*? 'tis plain from what follows, that 'tis the *Church of England*. But, who or what is this Church of *England*, which thus orders and appoints? Is it not *the King and Parliament of England*? Is not ALL Authority, both *Ecclesiastical* and *Civil*, within these Realms, lodg'd solely in them? They, and they only, order and decree what Ceremonies and religious Rites shall be practis'd in this Church; and what all its Bishops and Priests shall believe, and subscribe as Articles of their Faith. So that 'tis evident beyond dispute, that when we talk of OUR CHURCH, as *ordering* or *appointing*— we mean OUR KING AND OUR PARLIAMENT.

But what Authority have *These* (I speak it with due Reverence) to make Laws in CHRIST's Kingdom, the Church, and to prescribe Rites and Forms of Worship, which *Christ* hath not prescribed? If

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* Vide Peirce in Loc.

they have Authority to prescribe *one* such Rite, they have Authority to prescribe *ten*; and if *ten, ten thousand*: And thus a portentous way is open'd for the Tyranny and Superstition, which the Reformation shook off, to return upon us amain. For my own part, I desire never to forget that Admonition of our Lord, *Matt. xv. 9. In vain do they worship me, teaching for Doctrines the Commandments of Men.*

If *the Church*, i.e. the King and Parliament of England, have Authority to ORDER, That the Cross in one Sacrament and Kneeling at the other, shall be the indispensable Conditions of our receiving these Signs of the Christian Covenant, they have equal Authority to ORDER *Chrism, Spittle, Prostration* at the Communion-Table, or any Rites of the Greek or Roman Church. And what then becomes of our boasted Reformation? it only *chang'd* the dreadful Yoke, not *broke* it from our Necks: We withdrew our Consciences from the *Pope and Cardinals of Rome*, but 'twas only to subject them to the *King and Parliament of Great-Britain*.— If *these* be the Principles on which our Reformation stands, 'tis *the Sword*, not properly *the Church of England*; its *Soldiers*, not its *Priests*; its *Armies and Fleets*, not its *Arguments and Writings*, that are the Bulwark of the Reformation. And some may be apt to say, seeing either *the King and Parliament*, or *the Pope* must have the Homage of my Conscience, I will give it to the latter; for his Claim to that Homage, as being a Spiritual Person, a Successor of the Apostles— seems best founded of the two; and the Advantages he promises by Pardons, Indulgencies, &c. are much greater than any to be expected on the other side.

Vic. But why should you talk, Sir, of the Homage of Conscience? The Church, or, if you must have it, the King and Parliament of England, require

quire no such Homage : Have they not granted a Toleration to all Protestants, who are not satisfied with its Forms, to worship God in their own way?

Gent. True, I remember the Toleration, and think it one of the most glorious and equitable *Acts* ever *our Church pass'd* ; for till it enacted this Law, we had the very Essence of Popery incorporated into our Government ; we as really claimed Infallibility, and acted agreeably to that Claim, as *his Holiness* himself ; and with the Tyranny and enormous Power of which we stript the *Church of Rome*, we gravely deck'd *our own*. But, thank Heaven ! our Church is now in good measure recover'd from this *Delirium*, and no longer compels any by the powerful Convictions of Pillories, Fines, Imprisonments, &c. to come in ; but tho' it does not thus tyrannize over those who are *without* its Pale, are not all its own Members still held under the heavy Yoke ? To be a genuine Member of the Church of *England*, 'tis necessary that we believe its *Articles*, and worship according to its *Rites*. Now, must not all who believe its *Articles*, acknowledge it to have *Power to decree Rites and Ceremonies and Authority in Controversies of Faith* ? Agreeably to this Acknowledgment, must they not receive the two Sacraments of the Christian Covenant, loaded with *other Rites* than Christ himself hath appointed ? Must they not firmly hold the *Catholic Faith* contain'd in the *Athanasian Creed*, and declare that *whosoever doth not keep it whole and undefiled shall WITHOUT DOUBT perish everlastingly* ?

— Since then our Civil Powers make *other Rites* necessary to our Admission into *their Church*, than Christ has made necessary to our Admission into *his* ; and since they make the Belief of *other Doctrines* necessary to Salvation, than Christ hath made necessary ; what must be the Consequence, but that

Christ's Church, and *their Church* are not the same; and that all the Members of this latter must pay an Homage of Conscience to other Governours besides him. 'Tis Bishops and Priests pay them this Homage, by subscribing those Articles, and practising those Rites as *necessary Terms* of Christian Communion with them, which *their Authority* hath decreed, and thereby bow down and acknowledge *another Lord*, or Director in religious Affairs, besides JESUS CHRIST; and all its several Members also pay 'em this Homage, by submitting to those Rites this FOREIGN POWER hath enjoind.

And, if I have not trespass'd too far upon your Candour already, I would beg leave to observe, that the Distinction betwixt CHURCH and STATE, which hath occasion'd so much Clamour, is entirely without Foundation, and nothing but an empty Sound. The *Church of England* is as meerly a *Civil Thing*, and as much a *Creature of the State* as either of our Courts of Justice, or our Offices of Heraldry, Excise, &c. or any other Branch or Constitution of our civil Government. All its Officers, *Archbishops, Bishops, Deans, Arch-deacons, Prebendaries, Canons, Priests, &c.* are as really and as much STATE OFFICERS, as the *Judges, Colonels, Captains, Herald, Excisemen, &c.* They are all ALIKE made and unmade by the Civil Powers, are directed, limited, controul'd in the Execution of their several Offices; commanded *how, and when, and where* they shall act. The King is as much the Head of the *Church* as of the *Army*, and of the *Army* as of the *Church*; the Fountain of the Power by which the Bishops and Priests, as of that by which the Colonel or the Corporal acts. The Officers of both, *alike* owe their very Being to Parliamentary Authority, and their Maintenance and Support to Parliamentary Grants: And whatever Alteration the Wisdom of our Legislature may see

see fit to make in the Frame or Support of either, they have *alike* Power to make; and 'tis equally absurd and treasonable to say that our King and Parliament can alter the Revenues of the Customs or Excise, and apply them to other public Uses than now they are applied to, as that they can thus alienate or apply the Revenues of the Church.

Vic. You carry Matters to a vast length, Sir; but, when I say 'twas an ancient Usage of the Church, I mean of the *primitive* Christian Church, in the second and third Centuries, who commonly laid on Hands to confirm those who had been baptiz'd, as *Tertullian* and *Cyprian* most undeniably witness.

Gent. I own *Cyprian* and *Tertullian* speak of this Rite as practis'd in their Times; but I must beg leave to observe,

1. That Confirmation in those Days *immediately* follow'd Baptism, and was not deferr'd till many years after, as 'tis amongst us.

2. They thought that no Person was regenerated by the Holy Ghost till Hands were laid on him. *We do not, says Tertullian*, receive the Holy Ghost by Baptism, but being cleans'd by Water we are prepar'd for the Holy Ghost. — And Hands are laid on the Body, that the Soul may be illuminated by the Holy Spirit †.* But our Church is better taught; the Bishop declares to Almighty God, that these his Servants ARE regenerated both by Water and the Holy Ghost, even before he lays his Hands upon them. He therefore does it not *after the Example of those antient Fathers* neither, as well as not after that of the *Apostles*, as was before observ'd.

3. In

* Non quod in Aquis Spiritum Sanctum consequamur, sed in aqua emundati — Spiritui Sancto præparamur. De Baptif. Cap. vi.

† Caro manus Impositione adumbratur, ut & anima spiritu illuminetur. De Resurrectione, Cap. viii.

3. In those early days, *Priests* confirm'd as well as *Bishops*; but now, the *Bishop's Hands* are not suppos'd to give the Holy Ghost; yet as if there were some superior Sacredness in his, than in the *Priest's Hands*, this Act is by the Authority of our Church, confin'd to the *Bishop*. But,

4. Men of Learning and Modesty surely will blush to ground this Rite upon the Authority of the antient Church, because they know that *the same antient Church* esteem'd *Unction with Oil*, as important a Part or Appendix of Baptism as this *Laying on of Hands*. He that is baptiz'd, says *Cyprian**, must OF NECESSITY BE ANOINTED, that having receiv'd the *Chrism*, or *Unction*, he may become the *Anointed of God*, and have the *Grace of Christ in Himself*. And as this *Unction* follow'd Baptism, so *Exorcism* went before it; the Minister put his Hand upon the Person to be baptized, and breath'd on his Face, implying hereby the Expelling of the Devil; and thus he was prepared for Baptism and Confirmation, which were immediately to follow. Now as the SAME *Antiquity* which recommends one of these Rites, alike recommends them all, why are they not all alike receiv'd? Why do not our *Priests exorcise* and *anoint* as well as our *Bishops confirm*? the one is as *antique*, and therefore as *venerable* and *sacred* as the other.

Vic. No—— But the Wisdom of our Church appears in dropping all that is extravagant in the practice of the Antients; in not pretending to exorcise the Devil, nor to confer the Holy Ghost by laying on of Hands, but only thus solemnly to call upon Persons baptiz'd in their Infancy to renew their Baptismal Covenant, and to make a personal Surrender of themselves to the Holy Trinity.

Gent.

* Ungi quoque necesse est eum qui baptizatus sit, &c.—
Ep. ad Januar. de Ray. Hæret.

Gent. 'Tis surely very wise quite to drop Antiquity, seeing 'tis granted on all hands that so many extravagant and silly things were practis'd in the very antient Church.— Did the Bishop indeed, as you say, only solemnly call upon the People of his Diocese to renew their baptismal Covenant, and to confirm it at the Lord's Table, the Rite might be very useful; but as 'tis now manag'd, it appears to me an extremely *odd* and *unjustifiable thing*; it tends to propagate Superstition; exposes Christianity to Contempt; and dangerously co-operates with the great Deceiver of Men's Souls, by stifling their just Fears, and lulling them asleep in Vice.— Well, the first of my Assertions is, I hope, now pretty well clear'd, *viz.* That there is nothing *plausible*, much less *rational* to be urg'd FOR this Rite. Will you favour me with your wonted Goodness, whilst I go thro' the second, *viz.* That there is much to be said AGAINST it.

Vic. Argue, Sir, with your wonted Calmness, and I will patiently attend.

Gent. By the Order in our Common-Prayer, all Persons baptiz'd when they come to competent Age, and are able to say the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the ten Commandments, and the short Catechism, are to be brought to Confirmation*. The Bishop having ask'd—*Whether they renew the solemn Promise and Vow, that was made in their Name at Baptism*, upon their answering *we do*; declares in the most public and solemn manner, even in an *Address to God himself*, That he HAS vouchsafed to regenerate these his Servants by Water and the Holy Ghost, and to give them the Forgiveness of all their Sins; and laying his Hand upon the Head of each particular Person, *he certifies him, by that*

* A great part of what follows concerning Confirmation, Absolution, and the Burial of the Dead, was publish'd in the *Old Whig* N^o. 126, 127.

that Sign, of God's Favour, and gracious Goodness towards him.

Now this Bishop they are taught to look upon as an Ambassador of Jesus Christ, and a Successor of the Apostles, who had Power to forgive Sins ; and when they hear this venerable Person thus solemnly declaring that God **HATH** regenerated and forgiven them, can you blame them if they believe it, and in this Confidence presume their Souls to be in a safe State ?

And as a full Remission of Sins is to be had on such easy terms, no wonder, that thousands flock from all parts to be *bishop'd*, many of them with like Merriment as if going to a Revel ; and that Persons of very vitious and profligate Characters thrust themselves in, to be Partakers of *this Grace*. And I add, no wonder the deluded Creatures thinking their old Score thus fully quitted, with fresh Vigor begin a-new, and conclude the Day (which is often the case) with Drunkenness, Riot, and shameful Excess.

That ignorant and unthinking People should be thus easily deluded by Pretences of priestly Power, and be willing to receive *Imposition of Hands, to certify them* of God's Favour in their Regeneration and Pardon, *without* parting with their Vices and the Trouble of Repentance, is not so strange ; but that such learned and pious Men as our Reverend Bishops and Clergy, who know the Aptness of Mankind *to deceive themselves with false Hopes*, and the horrid Danger of their so doing, that *These* should thus contribute to lull them asleep in Vice, and without knowing their Hearts, or having a due Acquaintance with their Lives, declare them in God's Presence *regenerated and pardon'd*, is a Conduct truly surprizing.

What Warrant, in God's Name, have they to pronounce a Man's *Sins ALL forgiven*, and himself
regenerated

regenerated by the Holy Ghost, upon no other Grounds than his being able to answer the Questions of the short Catechism, and his professing that he does and will stand by his Baptismal Engagements? Is this the Notion our Right Reverend Prelates teach concerning REGENERATION; or do they really believe This to be the Condition of Christian Pardon? Will a meer Profession procure from God a certain and full Forgiveness? Are good Vows and Resolutions declared in the Church, infallible Proofs of Regeneration by the Holy Ghost? Is promising that a Man will repent and live godly in the World, that actual Repentance which alone secures the Divine Favour? Do not our learned Bishops know, that there are Multitudes who call Christ their Lord, i. e. who publickly profess to stand by their Baptismal Covenant, whom he will reject with Abhorrence at last? With what Conscience then or Face can a Venerable Prelate stand up and declare to ALMIGHTY GOD, that he HATH regenerated and forgiven, &c. The Expressions are couch'd in the most absolute and strongest Terms; there is no Condition implied; no Intimation that their Forgiveness depends upon their Care to keep and to live up to their Baptismal Engagements. No, but tho' their whole Life hath been a Course of Drunkenness, Debauchery, &c. yet upon their being able to say the Lord's Prayer, &c. and promising they will repent, the Bishop solemnly pronounces a most absolute Pardon on them; and lifting up his Eyes to Heaven, appeals to God that he HATH forgiven them all their Sins. And lest this should be too little to satisfy the Sinner, and perfectly allay the Clamours of his upbraiding Conscience, he lays his sacred Hand on him, and tells Almighty and Everlasting God, that he doth it after the Example of his holy Apostles, to certify him by this Token of his Favour and gracious Goodness toward him, i. e.

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that

that he is forgiven and regenerated [by the Holy Ghost.

Vic. To interrupt you, Sir, a Moment. ---- But to prevent Persons of immoral Lives from thrusting themselves in to partake of *this Grace* ; none are to be confirm'd but those whose Names by the Curates of their respective Parishes are given in to the Bishop.

Gent. Must the *Bishop* then in a Matter of so vast Importance act by *implicit Faith* in the *Curate* ? Whomsoever a *Curate* shall think proper to recommend, is his Recommendation a sufficient ground for his Lordship *confidently* to declare him regenerated and forgiven ? Are ALL our Country Curates Men of such *Probity, Wisdom, Temperance, Care*, that the Bishop can without scruple repose so extraordinary a Confidence in them ? ---- I am really astonish'd ! Besides, there is not a Word in the whole Office which gives the Curate any Instruction to regard the *moral Conduct* of those he recommends : If they can *answer the Questions of the short Catechism*, that is ALL requir'd of him ; upon This, they are order'd to be brought to the Bishop.---- And, agreeably to this *excellent Constitution*, upon almost every such Occasion very immoral and wicked Persons are seen *receiving upon their Knees* EPISCOPAL ABSOLUTION ; and are CERTIFIED by the Bishop's Hands of God's gracious Goodness towards them, &c.

Let me ask you, Sir, Is it any Breach of Charity to suppose that, amongst the vast Crouds which present themselves on such occasions, there *may be* and often *are* a great number whom God, *who knows their Hearts*, knows to be Men of corrupt Minds ; and to be still under the prevailing Power of their Lusts ? Can the Bishop himself in any Judgment of Charity suppose there are not many such ? How then does he DARE to declare to God *that*
he

he HATH fully forgiven these his Servants, when God at that very Time knows them NOT to be his Servants, and hath not at all forgiven 'em? Or, How will he PRESUME to lay his Hand on such to ASSURE 'em of God's gracious Goodness,---i. e. of their Regeneration and Forgiveness, when they are absolute Strangers to Repentance, and can have no Title nor Claim to the Blessings attending it? Is not this to address Heaven with a Falshood upon the Tongue; and in a very dangerous and bold manner to trifle with God and Man? 'Tis great Presumption surely in any who cannot search the Heart, to pronounce in so absolute and unconditionate a Manner concerning any of their Fellow-Creatures, that God hath forgiven him all his Sins, &c. The Apostles themselves durst not thus pronounce upon any Christians in their days, unless by the immediate Suggestion of the Holy Spirit: How came their Successors to be thus more knowing and able? rather let it be said, more rash and bold than they!

But see in what Absurdities such Pretensions involve Men. ---- We read *Acts viii.* that *Simon Magus* believ'd and was baptiz'd, and continu'd some time making a credible Profession of Christianity; no question he could say *the Lord's Prayer, the ten Commandments, and answer some of the Questions in the Catechism.* Now, had one of our Bishops been to visit *Samaria*, at that Time, he would without scruple have pray'd over this vile Impostor, laid Hands on him, and with ghostly Eyes lift up to Heaven, have inform'd God of this wonderful Secret, *that he had forgiven him all his Sins, and regenerated him by the Holy Ghost.* But, might not the MOST HIGH, who will be approach'd with Reverence, have justly rebuk'd the Insolence of such a Prelate, when he from whom nothing could be hid, well knew that *Simon's Pro-*

cession was an accurs'd Diffimulation ; and that even after his Baptism *his Heart was not right with God* ; and that he was yet in the Gall of Bitterness and Bond of Iniquity, as Peter and John plainly told him, exhorting him to repent, and thereby approv'd themselves faithful Bishops or Overseers, and freed themselves from his Blood.

And now, Sir, I hope you think me to stand acquitted of each part of my Promise, having prov'd, That there is very little to be said FOR this *Bishoping* or *Confirmation* ; but a great deal to be said AGAINST it.

Vic. I own there is something plausible in what you have offer'd ;--- but as the *Bishop*, not the *Curate*, is the chief Actor in this Solemnity, upon *Him*, if there be any due, must the blame be chiefly laid. --- However it shall, I hope, a little cool my eager Passion for the Lawn,--- make me bless my self in my Innocence, and be thankful I am no Bishop.

Gent. And yet perhaps not so innocent, nor happy neither, Sir, as you imagine. There are Parts of your own Office as a *Priest*, which are equally, nay more absurd and dangerous to the Souls of Men, than this Part of the Bishops. But--- I have too far tried both your Patience and Candor to enter upon a fresh Point.---

Vic. You know, Sir, I am no Bigot. TRUTH never *shuns*, because it never *suffers* by the strictest Search. There is nothing I desire more than to approve my self to GOD ; and fully to know, and faithfully to discharge my Duty, as a Minister of JESUS CHRIST ; you may depend therefore, upon my candid and patient Attention to any further Remarks.

Gent. What think you then, Sir, of those two Parts of your Office, *the Absolution of sick Penitents*, and *the Burial of the Dead* ?

In the former, the sick Person being moved to make a special Confession of his Sins if he feel his Conscience troubl'd with any weighty matter ; after such Confession the Priest shall absolve him (if he humbly and heartily desire it) after this sort : Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left Power to his Church to absolve all Sinners who truly repent and believe in Him, of his great Mercy forgive thee thine Offences ; and BY THE AUTHORITY COMMITTED TO ME, I ABSOLVE THEE FROM ALL THY SINS, IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY GHOST*. The Form is extremely solemn, and the Matter of the last Importance : It deserves therefore to be enquir'd,

I. WHAT and WHERE is *that Church*, to which Christ has left this Power ? By what Marks is it to be known, that we may all fly to it, to receive so extraordinary a Benefit ? Is it to the Catholic and Universal Church ; or to any National or Provincial Church ; or, is it to every particular Society of worshipping Christians, that this HIGH Power is left ? In what Persons is it lodg'd ? With the whole Body of the People, who, according to Scripture-Language, and the Doctrine of our own Articles, are properly called *the Church* ; or, with the *Ministers* or *Clergy*, who are never so called ? In the former part 'tis said *to be left to the Church* ; but in the latter, the Priest claims it as his Peculiar, a special Trust appropriated to himself (*by the Authority committed to me*——) to which, when his Claim shall have been fully prov'd, his Character shall be confess'd *indelible* and *sacred* ; and Incense and the Knee be offer'd Him, as the Representative of Christ on Earth. But,

II, That our Lord Jesus Christ *hath* committed, CAN commit no such Power to any fallible Man or Body

* Vid. Order for the Visitation of the Sick, in the Book of Common-Prayer.

Body of Men on Earth, is most indisputably evident. For if Christ hath given to any a Power *authoritatively* to ABSOLVE those who are truly penitent, he must also have given them a Power to know who are truly penitent; else 'tis a Power to do just nothing: For till they know them to be truly penitent, (*i. e.* till they can search their Hearts) they cannot *authoritatively* absolve them; and if they cannot do it till then, they cannot do it at all: So that 'tis really a Power to do what they cannot do, or a Power to do nothing. And is this a Power fit either for Christ to leave, or a wise Clergy, in this Age of free Enquiry, to claim?

Further,

III. Had the Priest any real Power from Christ *authoritatively* to absolve from Sin, yet surely he greatly errs in its Application. The Terms on which he absolves, are, by far, too *general* and *lax*. Upon a *special Confession*, if he feel his Conscience troubl'd with any weighty matter, the Priest is directed to absolve the Sinner. But is *meer Confession* of Sin ALL the Gospel demands, in order to its Forgiveness? Must it not be *forsook* and *broken off*, as well as *confess'd*? Are not the most debauch'd, when Sickness seizes, and Death is thought to approach them, wont to *feel their Conscience troubled*——readily to *confess* their Sins, to express great Sorrow, and to vow Amendment, if ipared?——But when the Danger is blown off, is it hardly ever seen that they return not to their Crimes with as mad a Gust as before? Is there one of a thousand who remembers and performs the Vows of his sick Bed?

This our worthy Clergy know, and often publickly complain of, when they press to *present* Repentance; and yet——hard and unhappy Lot! in direct contradiction to this Sense of their own Mind, to the exprefs Terms on which Pardon is promis'd,

promis'd in the Gospel, and to their most solemn and public Warnings *not to trust* to such sick-bed-Sorrows : — In contradiction to all these, when the sick Sinner sends for them, and thus confesses and laments his Sins, and desires Absolution, they are directed and required, with all possible Solemnity, even in the NAME OF THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY GHOST, to absolve him from *all* his Crimes, and to declare him fully forgiven. Strange trifling with Heaven, and the immortal Souls of Men! How dare I, in the Name of the *sacred Trinity*, ASSURE a Man that he is absolv'd from *all* his Sins, when I am NOT SURE he is absolv'd? Yea, how dare I thus assure Him, when the *only* Grounds of my doing it are but the *same* Signs of Repentance, which a thousand Sinners give, who are yet held under the Power and Guilt of their Crimes?

In a Court of human Judicature, what would that Man be deem'd, who should declare in the *Name of God*, a thing to be done, which he is *not sure is done*? Or, call Heaven to witness to the Certainty of what he is not at all certain of? Is it less wicked thus to trifle in *eternal* Affairs than in *temporal*; in the *Church*, than in the *State*; in the Court of God, than of the *King*? Less criminal and profane in the *Name* of the sacred Trinity, to declare a Man *to be* forgiven, who *may not be* forgiven; or, in other words, to call God to record for the *Truth of that*, which (perhaps) is all the while a *gross Falshood*? --- No longer let us wonder that *Cries of Priestcraft* are pour'd in such loud Volleys upon our Church, as seem to shake its very Basis, and portend it--- no good.--- I add,

IV. Another Absurdity in this dangerous and delusive Form is, That tho' the Confession be but *special*, the Absolution is *general*. If his Conscience be troubl'd with any weighty matter, he is to make

a *special Confession*, and this procures him a *general Pardon*; he is absolv'd from ALL his Sins. But by what Logick, or from what Scripture is this Inference drawn, That a Contrition for *some Sins*, shall obtain Forgiveness of *all Sins*? Or, that my acknowledging to the Priest some particular great Crimes, for which my Conscience troubles me, shall get the full Remission of all the many Errors and Iniquities of my whole Life?

WELL,--- but the sick Man dies,--- he lived a vicious and debauch'd Life, was a known Drunkard, Adulterer,--- but when his last Sickness came, he trembl'd at the thought of Death; sent for the Priest, confess'd his Sins, and desir'd to be absolv'd: The Priest by *Authority committed to him* in the most solemn Form of Words the Wisdom of Men or Angels can devise, even in the *Name of the Father*, &c. pronounces and declares him absolv'd from all his Sins. The unhappy Person thus dead,--- comes now to be BURIED. Here the Priest in the Face of a vast Croud, who well knew the Man's wicked Life (yea, tho' he gave not the least Sign of Repentance in his last Moments, and was known by them all not to have given it, but was cut down, perhaps, in the very Act of some enormous Villany; notwithstanding all this, the Priest before them all) solemnly declares, *That God hath taken to Himself the Soul of this our dear Brother*, --- gives Him hearty Thanks that it hath pleas'd Him to deliver this our Brother out of the Miseries of this sinful World,--- and prays, that when we shall depart this Life, we may rest in Him (Christ) AS our Hope is, this our Brother doth. What now must the attending Croud think of all this? If they think at all, it must be either,

First, That what the Priest hath said IS TRUE, and may be depended on as the *Word of God*, whose Ambassador he is supposed to be; and if
so---

so--my Neighbour, notwithstanding the Debauchery in which he lived, is now in a safe State--- there is no such need of *Virtue* to prepare a Man for the future World, as Preachers, yea, as our Priest himself is wont to tell us.--- Remission may be had in this World, and Salvation in the other, without breaking off my Sins.--- If I can but in my last Moments confess them to the Priest, he is *authoriz'd* by the HOLY TRINITY, to grant me full Forgiveness.--- I shall have Peace therefore, tho' I go on to add *Drunkenness to Thirst* ; and however vicious my Life be, may have Hope in my Death that I shall *rest in Christ*, as the Priest declares, he hopes *this our Brother doth*. Thus must a Man reason, if he *believes* what the Priest says. But,

Secondly, If these Pretensions and Expressions be examin'd but by common Sense, they appear to be all a *solemn Farce*, a *shocking and gross Delusion* ; a dangerous Encouragement to careless and immoral Living ; subversive of Holiness, Righteousness, Temperance, &c. *i. e.* of the Kingdom of Christ on Earth ; and calculated to advance the Power of Priests, and to stupify and enslave the Consciences of Men.--- It is a public Declaration of the Priest, that he hopes for THAT which, in many Cases, 'tis impossible he should hope for.

Vic. I have attended patiently your long Discourse ; not that I greatly needed its Conviction ; for I believe there are few amongst our *wise and thinking* Clergy, whose Sentiments on these Points much differ from yours. But what shall we do---? the Law prescribes, and we must obey. Both the Cases you mention, have often given me great Uneasiness, especially the latter ; the Office of Burial. Two of our great Archbishops, *Sancroft* and *Tillotson*, freely declared against it ; the former acknowledged he never took any Cure of Souls upon him,

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thro' his Dissatisfaction with that Office.--- And as tho' the Rubrick was not enough to pin us down to its constant and invariable Use in every other Case, besides those it excepts; the Canon comes after, and absolutely requires*, *That no Minister shall refuse to bury any Corps that is brought to the Church or Church-Yard in SUCH MANNER AND FORM as is prescrib'd in the Book of Common-Prayer; i. e. any one but those who die unbaptiz'd, excommunicated, or have laid violent Hands on themselves. And if he shall refuse it, except the Party deceas'd were denounced excommunicated majori Excommunicatione, he shall be suspended by the Bishop of the Diocese from his Ministry for three Months.* So that if a Man were shot dead in an Attempt to rob or murder his Neighbour, or to break into his House, or in ravishing his Wife, yet when brought to be buried, we must thank God that he hath taken to Himself, &c. and profess our Hope that he rests in Christ.

Gent. Truly, Sir, your Case is extremely hard,-- I think your Consciences deserve Relief, much more than the insolvent Debtors: And as I have the Honour to be a Member of the House of Commons, I would to my utmost promote a Bill for that purpose. 'Tis a Reproach to the Honour, and manifestly tends to corrupt the Morals of our Nation, and to banish all Faith and Integrity from amongst us, to force our Clergy to subscribe Articles they do not believe, and to address the divine Majesty in Forms they do not approve, but inwardly condemn. It cannot but grate upon a generous and brave Mind to be thus shackled and pinn'd down.--- Much more must it gall the Spirit of a well-instructed CHRISTIAN, who is the LORD's Freed-man; one whom CHRIST hath set free from all human Authority in Matters of Religion; and hath COMMANDED to call no Man Master but Himself.---

Why

Why do you not petition to the Parliament for Relief?

Vic. To be free, Sir,-- there is so much Bigotry and Superstition amongst the Clergy themselves, and so afraid are they, that if a single Pin of the Ecclesiastic Frame be pull'd out, the whole Hierarchy will be demolish'd, that no Petition of this kind can be ever expected from them. No; but as the King and Parliament of *England* are the only proper *Fathers* and Governors of our Church, to them alone it belongs to consider and redress these Matters of Complaint.

Gent. I shall heartily encourage an Attempt of this kind, being fully convinc'd that the Circumstances of our Church greatly require it. A Spirit of Freedom and Enquiry is gone forth into the present Age. Nothing but what has *Reason* or *Scripture* to support it, will now pass for *sacred*: yea, every Ceremony and Claim in Matters of Religion, which is not thus supported, will pass for *Farce* and *solemn Mockery* with Men of Virtue and Sense: And as 'tis only amongst *such* that true Religion can flourish, nothing can more concern us than to approve our establish'd Doctrines and Forms of Worship to them. Let me tell you an Occurrence not quite foreign to the present Subject. I was lately in a full Room of Gentlemen of good Sense, when the following Article was read aloud from the common News-Paper.--- *The Right Reverend Father-in-God the Lord Bishop of ---, yesterday set out for a remote Parish of his Diocess, to consecrate a Piece of Ground for the Enlargement of its Church-Yard, the ancient Limits being too narrow conveniently to receive their Dead.*--- It would have griev'd a good Churchman to see the unbelieving Smile it rais'd over all the Room. --- And cannot their Lordships make *holy Water*, says one, as well as *holy Ground*? Methinks there

should be nought in one Element which makes it more difficult or unapt for Consecration, than another. Heaven, no doubt, has empower'd them for *both alike* ; and one would imagine it as much for one's Soul's Health, to have the Body when living bedew'd often with *holy* Water, as when dead to lie perishing in holy Earth.

In former Ages, replied another, when Mystery and Superstition reign'd in awful Silence, such a solemn Farce might have been acted without much Offence. Deluded People might flock to see the wonderful Transformation of *unholy* into *holy* Ground, and reverence the Man that made it ; but in the present Age of Light, such a monkish Device cannot lift up its Head without drawing upon itself abundant Ridicule : The most ignorant of the common People can hardly treat it with Decency, and forbear laughing out.--- I wish our Bishops would be very sparing in such Parts of their sacred Function ; lest whilst they consecrate Church-Yards, they unconsecrate themselves : If they dignify these holy Plats, 'tis with the Spoils of their own Characters ; and however *sacred* they make the Ground, they make themselves extremely *mean*.

A third Gentleman observ'd, to what mischievous and mad Purposes this *false* Notion of *Holiness* had been applied by crafty Priests. Tithes are *holy* : No Government therefore, without great Sin, can touch 'em, or alienate the least Tittle of 'em. 'Tis Sacrilege, 'tis Abomination for Lay-Impropriators to finger this sacred Treasure ; and sooner or later these Robbers of *holy Church* may expect — Vengeance upon them. The Church's Walls are *holy* ; 'tis the Temple and House of God. *Palestine* is an *holy* Land ; that such sacred Ground therefore should not be polluted by *Saracens* and *Turks*, the holy Fathers of the Church, in the
space

space of four Years; sent over 600,000 of their dear Children to wrest it from them, who all died Sacrifices upon it, and afresh consecrated it with their Blood. Yea, above two Millions of Christian Lives, from first to last, fell in this enthusiastical and mad Attempt. That compleatest *System of Villany* that ever oppress'd the Earth, calls it self, and by many Ages and Kingdoms has been reverently acknowledg'd as, the *holy* Catholic Church. Yea, That liveliest Image of Hell it self, the *Court of Inquisition*, its *Officers, Tribunal, &c.* are all HOLY; even its very Jails are consecrated Places, they are *Santa Casa*, holy Prisons. Whither will not the Superstition and Wantonness of Priests hurry them, if not curb'd by Lay-Discretion? It looks as if the infernal Powers were sporting themselves with human Sottishness, and trying to what Depths of Stupidity they could sink 'em. We laugh at the *Egyptians* for worshiping Leeks and Garlick, and holding Cats and Oxen in religious Veneration: But will not After-ages more justly laugh at us, for consecrating Stones and Timber, and paying a religious Regard to Houses and Plats of Ground?

Vic. Not religious Regard neither; that would make it Idolatry.

Gent. As to its Idolatry, look you, Sir, to that; — but that the Regard paid is *religious*, admits but of little doubt: You will not call it *civil*. 'Tis set apart by a *religious Officer*, for a *religious Purpose*, with *religious Solemnity*, by Prayer, &c. No meerly *civil* Person is able thus to consecrate an House or Piece of Ground; no meerly *civil* Person (*i. e.* no one who is unbaptiz'd or excommunicated from the *Christian Church*) hath Right to lie in this holy Ground; 'tis therefore a *religious*, not a *civil* Regard, which is paid our Churches and their Yards. And why it is not as great Stupidity

dity for *Christians* to pay religious Respect to a *Plat of Earth* or an *House*, as for *Egyptians* to pay it to an *Onion* or a *Cat*, I profess I cannot see; of the two, methinks the latter is much the most excusable. There is some Image of Deity, there is *Life* in these; in the other there is none.

And as you have mention'd *Idolatry*, you will give me leave, Sir, to ask, Why is Image or Idol-worship so offensive to God, and so strictly forbidden? Is it not chiefly, that it weakens Mens Belief of the *Omnipresence* of the Deity, and represents Him as *confin'd* more to one Place than another. This God resents as derogatory to his Honour, and injurious to the Cause of Virtue and true Religion: And yet, what is that *bowing* towards the *Altar* and the *East*, which is practis'd amongst us, but a dangerous Approach towards this Popish and Pagan Worship? For when the Congregation are taught to turn about from the *West* or the *South*, and devoutly worship towards the EAST, how natural is it for them to think that the God whom they worship is *more present* THERE, than in any other Quarter; for if he were not *more present* THERE, why should they thus solemnly and constantly turn towards it? But, if this Practice tends to cherish such wrong Apprehensions in the common People, (who in all Ages and all Countries have been too prone to debase and confine the Divine Majesty in their Conceptions of Him) I shall not stick to pronounce it a very dangerous Advance towards *Idolatry* and Image-worship. From worshipping *towards* the Altar, 'tis but too easy to pass to worshipping *the Altar* it self. Our learned Clergy know, that in some such Manner as this, the Worship of Images at first slid into the Church; and from so small a Beginning, that enormous Corruption which now overspreads so vast a Part of the Christian World, chiefly arose.

Vic.

Vic. I own, Sir, the Justness of your Remarks, and can only say that I wish, and am certain Multitudes of my Brethren join heartily in the Wish, that our Liturgy were revised ; its exceptionable Passages amended or expung'd ; that *indifferent* Things were left *indifferent* ; that no other Terms were made necessary to *Christian Communion* than CHRIST hath made necessary ; and that none of the LORD's *Ministers* should be constrain'd to deny the LORD's Table and the LORD's Bread, to those whom at the same Time they verily believe to be the LORD's *faithful and accepted Servants*, and to belong to his Household of Faith. — Till the Things you have now remark'd on, and some other that might be mention'd, are set right, our Church can never hold up its Head with Boldness. Infidels will laugh, will teaze and insult ; and from the Absurdity of some establish'd Doctrines and Forms of Worship, draw Prejudices and Cavils against Christianity it self.

Those who dissent from Her will too justly retort upon her the heinous Sin of *Schism*, she has long branded them withal ; in as much as by her *unscriptural* Rites she makes a grievous Rent or Division in the Christian Church, *rejecting* those whom Christ *receives* ; and casting out from her Communion those whom she must believe to belong to the Communion of Saints, and to be real Members of Christ.

Gent. To speak freely, Sir, to me it seems manifest, That a Church so unequally pois'd with the *Weight* of immense Revenues and Grandeurs on one hand ; and with the *Lightness* of superstitious Forms and enormous Claims on the other, can never be *well establish'd* ; it carries the Principles of Dissolution in its very Frame. — Its Honours and Wealth will keep many, no doubt,

doubt, attach'd firmly to its Interest: But--- may it not be fear'd, that in some future Age the first rapacious Hand that shall find it self *able*, will seize the rich Prey? That the Revenues which now support it, will some time or other prove the occasion of its Ruin? like the Temple of *Belus*, that once richest and most *sacred* Treasure of the Earth, which *Xerxes* destroy'd to enrich himself with its Wealth. But----- Here is Company I see coming, whose Presence will put an end to our Talk upon these Subjects.-----

F I N I S.



